

# Xenophobia in South Africa: Alignment of policy-making with the aim of the *Missio Dei* (Mission of God)

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**Abstract:** Generally, the problem of xenophobia remains a complex and challenging topic for most countries of the world, for Africans and South Africans in particular. Constructed upon existing literature, this paper contributes to the discourse on anti-immigrant or xenophobic feelings in South Africa. This paper uses *Missio Politica* as a missiological framework combined with political theology to examine xenophobia. Although alluring further extensive research, it represents the neglected step in organising the vast body of missiological perspectives on the subject of xenophobia regarding the objective of the *Missio Dei*. It is entirely devoted to seeking answers to the question of xenophobia by appealing to the correct understanding of *Missio Dei's* goal as demonstrated in the account of Noah's Ark in Genesis 6-9. Consequently, it concludes that to circumvent xenophobic incidents, African countries must first prioritise salvation for their local citizens, just as Noah did with his own family, before attempting to invite the entire continent into the tiny ark of salvation. Correspondingly, it concludes that South African policy-makers should familiarise themselves with important religious ideologies of their constituencies to shape public policies that are compatible with societal religious aspirations. Xenophobia has become an issue of great concern, particularly in South Africa. In the discipline of missiology, the current literature does not provide a clear methodology for solving xenophobia. This study represents the first *missio politica* analysis of the impact of xenophobia on the goal of *Missio Dei*.

**Keywords:** *Missio Dei*; *missio politica*; missiology; political theology; politics; salvation; xenophobia.

**Abstrak:** Secara umum, masalah xenofobia menjadi topik yang kompleks dan menantang bagi sebagian besar negara di dunia, khususnya bagi orang Afrika dan Afrika Selatan. Didasarkan pada literatur yang ada, makalah ini berkontribusi pada wacana tentang fenomena anti-imigran atau xenofobia di Afrika Selatan. Makalah ini menggunakan *Missio Politica* sebagai kerangka misiologis yang dipadukan dengan teologi politik untuk mengkaji xenofobia. Meskipun kajian tentang xenofobia ini membutuhkan kajian yang berkelanjutan, tulisan ini merupakan langkah awal untuk melihat hal terabaikan dalam melihat beragam perspektif misiologis dalam masalah xenofobia dan kaitannya dengan tujuan *Missio Dei*. Tulisan ini sepenuhnya ditujukan untuk mencari jawaban atas pertanyaan xenofobia dengan menarik pemahaman yang benar tentang tujuan *Missio Dei* seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam kisah Bahtera Nuh dalam Kitab Kejadian 6-9. Dengan demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa untuk menghindari insiden xenofobia, negara-negara Afrika pertama-tama harus memprioritaskan keselamatan bagi warga lokal mereka, seperti yang dilakukan Nuh dengan keluarganya sendiri, sebelum mencoba mengundang seluruh benua ke dalam bahtera kecil keselamatan. Sejalan dengan hal tersebut, maka pembuat kebijakan Afrika Selatan harus mengakomodir ideologi agama dalam membuat kebijakan publik yang kompatibel dengan aspirasi keagamaan masyarakat. Xenophobia telah menjadi isu yang sangat memprihatinkan, khususnya di Afrika Selatan. Dalam disiplin misiologi, literatur saat ini tidak memberikan metodologi yang jelas untuk memecahkan xenofobia. Studi ini merupakan analisis *missio politica* pertama tentang dampak xenofobia pada tujuan *Missio Dei*.

**Kata Kunci:** *Missio Dei*; *missio politica*; misiologi; teologi politik; politik; penyelamatan; xenofobia.

## 1. Introduction

It can be said that the main elements of xenophobia have always been present in South Africa even before the dawn of Democracy in 1994 (Chandia & Hart, 2016, p. 29; Mubangizi, 2021, pp. 139–140). Desai and Vehad (2013) point out that as early as December 1994 and January 1995, foreign nationals living in Alexandra were among the early victims of xenophobic attacks perpetrated by local citizens (Desai & Vehad, 2013, p. 158). However, for the first time in May 2008, South Africa made international news headlines concerning xenophobia when conflict erupted between its citizens and foreign nationals who had been in South Africa by that time. Just in that month alone, this conflict resulted in 62 foreign nationals being killed hundreds more being injured, and thousands being displaced (Vromans, Schweitzer, Knoetze, & Kagee, 2011, pp. 90–93). Again, xenophobic attacks resurfaced on 11 April 2015 around the coastal city of Durban's central business district (CBD) in KwaZulu-Natal wherein local South Africans accused foreign nationals of snatching their employment opportunities (Mlambo, 2019, p. 59). Similarly, these attacks spread to other parts of the country. As several scholars have rightly observed, such unprecedented headlines put the spotlight not only on the legitimacy of South African democracy but also on its foreign policy vision (Pugh, 2014, p. 227; Solomon & Haigh, 2009, p. 6). The big question in all of this, however, is what contributes to xenophobia and how such a contribution detracts from the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei* (mission of God). In other words, the point here is not necessarily to rethink the notion of xenophobia but to examine how factors contributing to xenophobia and the mere existence of xenophobia contradict the objective of the *Missio Dei*, initially at the local level in South Africa as a country and ultimately on the African continent and elsewhere.

The work in this paper is divided into several yet related parts: The first section will present the *missio politica* as integrated into political theology as the preferred method to reconcile the mandate of politics with that of the *Missio Dei*. The second section will underscore total salvation as the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei* and invoke the scenario painted in Noah's account as recorded in Genesis 6-9 to underscore the notion of local or restricted salvation. The third section will discuss xenophobia concerning its outbreak in South Africa in 2008 and 2015 respectively. Further, it will point to both unemployment and poverty in the sense of the unfulfilled pre-1994 promises of a better life for all, as the main contributors to the problem of xenophobia in South Africa. Finally, it will seek to reconcile the work of public policy-making with the mandate of the *Missio Dei*. Additionally, this section will argue that it is important for policymakers to be familiar with the work and ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*.

## 2. *Missio politica* in political theology

The problem of the relationship between religion and politics or church and state goes far and proves difficult to solve. While it may be logical, due to a certain historical animosity, to expect an appropriate distance between politics and religion, at the same time politics in its broader application cannot be excluded from the enterprise of *Missio Dei*, especially considering how *Missio Dei* has been understood since the International Missionary Conference (IMC) at Willingen in 1952. Furthermore, in a country like South Africa, where almost 80% of the citizens are Christian (Schoeman, 2017, pp. 1–7) and where politicians turn to the churches for support (Lodge, 1995, pp. 496–497), it is important to align religious and political ideologies toward a unified goal. This paper will first apply the political theology framework as a new broad interdisciplinary field between religion and politics (Martin, 2020, p. 16) and then take this connection further by linking it to *missio politica* as a missiological framework that attempts to define politics concerning *Missio Dei* (Thinane, 2021, pp. 1–13). According to Langmead (2014), missiology should always draw on contexts, secular disciplines, politics, and even intercultural engagements to formulate its understanding and knowledge system (Langmead, 2014, p. 71). In other words, the core task of missiology is to understand the role of other disciplines, cultures, or even politics concerning God's mission in the world. Consequently, scholars like Thinane (2021) have correctly tried to highlight the background of *missio politica* suggesting that the 1952 IMC Willingen itself was heavily influenced by various political developments around the world. He referred generally to political processes such as the decolonisation of Asian and African countries between 1945-1960 and 1930-1970,

but in particular to the Chinese Revolution of 1949 as some of the dramatic political contexts in which the Willingen Conference was convened. He then built on the excellent foundation already laid by Professor Reimer in 2017 to emphasise further the importance of the *missio politica* as a missiological framework that integrates the work of politics into the broader context of the *Missio Dei* (Reimer, 2017; Thinane, 2021, p. 2). It can thus be said that the *missio politica* recognises the work of politics only in terms of how that work contributes to the broader context of the *Missio Dei*. In essence, the *missio politica* is about the task of translating into political practice the eternal mandate of the *Missio Dei*, or better yet, of showing the role of politics in achieving the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*. With particular reference to the content of this paper, *missio politica* is used here as a missiological framework to help examine the problem of xenophobia or how it affects the work of *Missio Dei* in the world, particularly in South Africa.

### *Missio Dei's Goal*

Amongst missiologists, there is a growing consensus that the concept of *Missio Dei* from the point of view of the International Missionary Conference (IMC) in Willingen in 1952 led to a somewhat more radical understanding of the theology of mission (Thinane, 2021, pp. 1–8). The focus on mission pre-Willingen was primarily centred on the church's evangelisation and planting of churches (Bosch, 1991, p. 370; Engelsviken, 2003, p. 486; Laing, 2009, p. 90). To correct the Church's place in God's mission, the Willingen conference emphasised not in so many words that the triadic God is by nature a missional God and that the church along with all other social institutions is participants in the broader work of *Missio Dei* (Richebächer, 2003, p. 589; Sarisky, 2014, p. 258). It emphasised that God and not the church are at the centre of the mission, which effectively means he alone is the source from whom the mission is derived and to whom the mission is directed (Goheen, 2002, p. 117). According to Laing (2009), the mission does not originate out of the church nor any other human agency; instead, the mission is the attribute of the triadic God himself (Laing, 2009, p. 90). Niemandt (2020) who stated unequivocally substantiates this: 'The Church is part and parcel of the preparations and is called to be involved in God's restorative work' (Niemandt, 2020, p. 14).

Niemandt (2020) connected the inherent task of *Missio Dei* with salvation from the perspective of Apostle Paul by first asking the question: 'What is God up to in the world? What is the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God?' he then answered this question by stating unequivocally that: 'for Paul the answer is clear: to bring salvation to the world' (Gorman, 2015, p. 635; Niemandt, 2020, pp. 19–20). In other words, the *Missio Dei* as a whole is directed toward the goal of salvation as desired by the triadic God. Once that salvation is attained, then the kingdom of God can be said to reign on earth as it is in heaven. Buys (2020) puts it: 'the goal of the inner trinitarian covenant (the *pactum salutis*) is the ushering in the Kingdom of God through the salvation of the elect and thus ultimately to confirm the glory of the Triune God' (Buys, 2020, p. 4). Similarly, Engelsviken (2003) agreed with the view of George F. Vicedom who equally argued that the main purpose of *Missio Dei* is salvation. He wrote, 'The revelation of God in his mission is always for the sake of the salvation of human beings'. He further emphasises that this can be interpreted as either present or future as long as it has a positive impact on the much-desired Kingdom of God (Engelsviken, 2003, pp. 483–484). These views are consistent with arguments that suggest the *Missio Dei* began immediately after the Fall, which involved the transition of the first humans from a state of innocent obedience to a state of guilty disobedience to God as recorded in Genesis 1-3 (Arthur, 2009, pp. 1–7; Thinane, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, it can be argued that salvation is the main purpose of the *Missio Dei*, to be achieved now for the future. The story of Noah in Genesis 6 is a clear demonstration of how to present salvation can be achieved following the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*.

### *Noah's Ark and salvation*

The account of Noah's Ark as recorded in Genesis 6-9, particularly concerning salvation is a case in point, demonstrating both the work and goal of the *Missio Dei*, as it relates to the selection of a confined group of people in a specific context and time. There is a very extensive literature on the story

of Noah that attempts to interpret that story in various ways for various purposes (Clark, 1971, pp. 261–280; Haleem, 2006, pp. 38–57; Tiemeyer, 2017, pp. 319–239) which the present work will not delve into. Controversial, relevant parallels can be drawn from this account because, like many other biblical stories, it reinforces the reality that from time to time God attempted to select a particular group of people for His mission to carry out salvation (Genesis 12:2). God has always chosen a certain group among the nations to use as distinct models to demonstrate the limited participants in the *Missio Dei*. However theologically this approach may be problematic since it can be wrongly concluded that it contradicts the openness with which the body of Christ is to be characterised. Conversely, it is important to always contextualise the implication of the body of Christ. Noah's account provided theologians with early bases of what came to be known as election theology, which suggests that the Triune God favours some individuals and groups over others whenever he elects to. According to Kaminsky (2011), it is important not always to try to dismiss particularism in favour of universalism, as if it is contrary to God's character to elevate one individual or select group above others (Kaminsky, 2011, pp. 34–44). It is thus no coincidence that Noah was chosen by God along with his family and two of every kind of living creature to be saved from what became his impending judgment on earth during that time. Scholars such as Clark (1971) have argued that even though Noah was somehow righteous, his righteousness alone could not automatically qualify him for salvation. Instead, the mere fact that he was obedient enough to Yahweh's commands to the point of succeeding in the test of building the ark is the main reason for he and members of his family to become the selected recipients of salvation. In other words, his righteousness, which was necessary for everyone who takes part in the *Missio Dei*, was incomplete or imperfect until at that time he fulfilled all that God had commanded him to do (Clark, 1971, pp. 17, 280).

Therefore, based on the above theology, it can be argued that the fact that Noah was able to find sufficient power to build the ark to bring members of his family to salvation became the qualifying mark of his righteousness. The heads of state need to build enough arks to bring much-needed salvation to their constituents. Once world leaders understand the concept of limited salvation, the goal of the *Missio Dei* will be realised sooner than expected. The moral of this line of argument corresponds to the quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who said: 'Let everyone sweep in front of his own door, and the whole world will be clean'. More important is the realisation of the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*, first by individual nations and finally by the collective nations. No one could have said it better than Clark (1971). Theological concern is the realisation of Yahweh's purpose for the world and nation when its actions, including those of its leaders, demand judgment (Clark, 1971, p. 280). This means that any failure or success of heads of state to build arks of salvation for their constituents can inevitably lead to either salvation or the judgment of such nations. However, it then becomes important not to sacrifice the limited rescue of one particular context for the benefit of all other contexts. Each nation must endow with Noah-like leaders who work hard to build arks of salvation for their respective nations. Every single nation must empower to produce leaders who are virtuous and obedient like Noah. Once such leaders are produced, they will know how to make important decisions and policies that on the one hand reflect the active work of *Missio Dei*, and on the other hand even strive to reach their ultimate goal from local to global spaces. In the case of Africa, African leaders must be virtuous and diligent enough to avoid a situation where their constituents are forced to flee to neighbouring countries for rescue, straining those countries' limited resources. Maybe as merely a footnote to this argument one must endeavour to dismiss the foreseeable argument that will seek to invoke or appeal the command of 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mark 13:31; Leviticus 19:17-18), as demonstrated by the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. The mere wording of this commandment is self-explanatory in that the transference of one's love to the neighbour is done with the assumption or on the premise of self-worth. As correctly observed by Young (1983), most theologians have and continue to invoke this commandment without understanding that it presuppose self-love (Young, 1983, p. 266). Koenane (2018), while used differently than intended in this article, spoke of the ontology that perceives the other as an extension of itself (Mojalefa L.J. Koenane, 2018, pp. 1, 4). This simply means that there must be self before other. Therefore, regardless of the interpretation sought, be it in terms of oneself or love

of neighbour, the core understanding that emerges from this commandment is that governments, as the embodiment of their electorate, first show enough love for their own people before they transfer it to people in other countries. Furnish (1982), referring to Leviticus 19:2, consistently puts it in a nutshell: 'In this instance, the concept neighbour is restricted to members of one's own group, the people of Israel' (Furnish, 1982, p. 327). A further argument is related to the kind of love that Noah relied on to obtain salvation for himself and a member of his own family first. In other words, not only he but also God saw them as worthy of salvation. As good and humanistic as it sounds, sacrificial love is not applied in all cases. The Good Samaritan needed resources to bandage and clean the injured human's wound, he needed a donkey and money to pay an innkeeper. Without all these resources, it will certainly be difficult for him to properly care for the injured.

### 3. Xenophobia

The term xenophobia is composed of two Greek words: ξένος - *xénos* which means strange, alien, or foreign, and the word φόβος - *phóbos* which means fear or panic. Consequently, the term xenophobia has been widely understood to refer in some way to fear or hatred towards foreigners or people of a different nationality. This is why the word xenophobia is traditionally used to describe instances of hatred towards foreigners. Mlambo (2019) is bold enough to say: 'it (xenophobia) is the hatred and violence towards foreigners' (Mlambo, 2019, p. 55). Consistent with this description, Solomon and Kosaka (2013), argued that such hatred is then embodied in discriminatory attitudes, often expressed in violence and abuse of all kinds (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 5). Steenkamp (2009) moves further to include that this hatred is directed at foreign nationals not only because of them being a different nationality but because there are unknown to the locals (Steenkamp, 2009, p. 439). This view is supported by Solomon and Kosaka (2013), reciting Moge kwu (2005), who equally pointed out that xenophobia sees foreigners as a threat because they do not have adequate information about them (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 5). Alder (2008) argues that such fear of the unknown then develops into a kind of suspicion about the presence or intentions of foreigners (Alder, 2008, pp. 1–2). However, since it is clear from the literature that there is no classic definition or description of xenophobia, as its characteristics vary from one context to another. this perspective is equally advanced by Harris (Harris, 2002), who argues that for other contexts such as South Africa, it is misleading to restrict the definition of xenophobia to fear or hatred towards foreigners (Harris, 2002, p. 170). Therefore, it is important to strive for a new definition that fits in a specific context. Accordingly, in the case of xenophobia in South Africa, this paper defines or describes xenophobia as an element of dislike or uneasiness about the presence and intentions of foreigners in South Africa.

#### *Xenophobia in South Africa*

Although South Africa has been cited in the literature as one of Africa's most enlightened leading countries since the advent of democracy in 1994 (Alden & Pere, 2009, pp. 145–169; Crush, 2001, p. 103), In recent years, this country has come under criticism for the way its citizens treat their fellow foreign citizens, particularly foreign nationals from other African countries. Xenophobic incidents in 2008 and 2015 are a case in point since most scholars look into these respective years as largely characterised by nationwide spikes in xenophobic attacks against foreigners in South Africa.

Several scholars seem to point to May 11, 2008, as the day when heightened forms of xenophobia began in the Alexandra township of Johannesburg (Pugh, 2014, p. 227; Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 20; Steenkamp, 2009, pp. 439–442). Polzer (2010) also argues the township of Alexandra was the epicentre of the May 2008 xenophobic incidents (Polzer, 2010, p. 6). Sources say shortly after a local community meeting to discuss rising crime in Alexandra. During this meeting, local residents concluded that foreign nationals were in some way to blame for these uncontrollably high crime rates. They then decided to evict forcibly all foreigners from their territory. A report showed that a mob of South African citizens broke into a factory housing foreigners from Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique and demanded that they leave the township immediately. One of these foreigners from Zimbabwe was Sibonile Mabhena who, as reported in Desai and Vahed (2013), was asked by local residents to leave

his shack immediately during that night, resulting in him and his family members sleeping in an open veld (Desai & Vahed, 2013, p. 151). Ultimately, within a short space of time, this xenophobic violence had spread rapidly to larger parts of Gauteng province and other provinces throughout South Africa. According to Polzer (2010), these attacks were in part initiated by some South African business owners to eliminate competition between their businesses and those of foreign nationals (Polzer, 2010, p. 6). This then explains why shops and businesses owned by foreign nationals were either destroyed or, in the worst case, set on fire. These incidents inevitably resulted in many deaths and injuries, particularly among foreigners.

In 2015, the second wave of xenophobic violence resurfaced in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) and once again spread to other provinces in the country. According to both Mlambo (2019) and Tella (2016), this re-emergence was fuelled by the late Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini's remark made on 30 March 2015 when he suggested that foreigners should return to their homelands because they were unfairly depleting the scarce resources meant for native South Africans (Mlambo, 2019, p. 59; Tella, 2016, p. 142). This is also supported by Bekker (2015), who pointed out that when King Zwelithini addressed the Pongolo community at a moral renewal event, he said foreigners had to 'take their bags and go' and further accused the South African government of failing to protect its own citizens from the 'influx of foreign nationals' (Simon, 2015, p. 234). Both Dube (2015) and Koenane (2018) relied on De Vos (2015) to recite the king's words:

We talk to people South Africans who do not want to listen, who do not want to work, who are thieves, child rapists, and house breakers ... When foreigners look at them, they will say let us exploit the nation of idiots. As I speak you find their unsightly goods hanging all over or shops, they dirty our streets. We cannot even recognise which shop is which; there are foreigners everywhere. I know it is hard for other politicians to challenge this because they are after their votes. Please forgive me, but this is my responsibility, I must talk, I cannot wait for five years to say this. As king of the Zulu Nation ... I will not keep quiet when our country is led by people who have no opinion. It is time to say something. I ask our government to help us to fix our own problems, and help us find our own solutions. We ask foreign nationals to pack their belongings and go back to their countries (Dube, 2015, p. 1; Mojalefa L.J. Koenane, 2018, p. 3).

Shortly after, on 11 April 2015 there was an outbreak of xenophobic attacks on foreigners in KZN province, driven by rumours that while locals were embroiled in strike actions over wage disputes, their employers were beginning to hire foreigners to replace them. Similar to 2008, hundreds of foreigners were injured, shops were looted and many were displaced across South Africa, while around seven people lost their lives (Amusan & Mchunu, 2017, pp. 1–3; Dube, 2015, p. 1). Unfortunately, to the day of writing this article, South Africa continues to witness manifestations of xenophobia in various forms. What then becomes more important is to engage in discourses that attempt to uproot the causes of such incidents of conflict, rather than resorting confidently to discourses that portray South Africans as bad people while ignoring factors leading to such unfortunate and inevitable outcomes. The next sections highlight unemployment, poverty, and the lack of a better life for all as the main causes of xenophobia in South Africa.

#### *Unemployment, Poverty, and Xenophobia*

Like many other countries in the world and especially African countries, South Africa is characterised by rising unemployment rates, which in turn lead to high levels of poverty (Kingdon & Knight, 2004, pp. 931–408). Some scholars believe that under democracy these figures have risen to worse levels than under apartheid (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren, & Woolard, 2008, pp. 715–740; Naidoo, 2006, pp. 55–78). Against the background of such high levels of unemployment and poverty, xenophobic attacks emerged in South Africa in recent years to this day. It is for this reason that a handful of scholars have seen both unemployment and poverty as the main drivers leading local South Africans to become xenophobic (Mamabolo, 2015). Consistent with such logic as noted by scholars such as Steenkamp (2009), local South Africans naturally concluded that hundreds of

thousands of foreigners who had arrived in South Africa at different times were somehow responsible for their socio-economic plight since they are readily available to provide cheap and unskilled labour to potential South Africa's employers (Steenkamp, 2009, p. 442).

Solomon and Kosaka (2013) have traced South African hostility towards immigrants, or xenophobia, back to the apartheid era, so to speak, when white entrepreneurs gave cheap jobs to immigrants, to the exclusion of local natives (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 10). Similarly, Tella (2016) alluded to several scholars attributing this problem to the apartheid government, under which there were policies allowing a large influx of white immigrants to South Africa than black African immigrants (Tella, 2016, pp. 143–144). This is further supported by Mlambo (2019) who found that several mining companies attracted a large inflow of African migrants from countries such as Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana, and Zimbabwe to come and work in South Africa in the early 19th century under apartheid government (Mlambo, 2019, p. 55). In such an environment, local South Africans would ordinarily view the presence of foreign national as somewhat a competition for employment. Desai and Vahed (2013) cited a ward counselor, Thobile Gqola who at one stage indicated that in his local area alone 60% of local residents were unemployed while at the same time foreign nationals owned almost every business in that area (Desai & Vahed, 2013, p. 146). Consequently, there can be no doubt that when foreigners are employed in a job that many other unemployed South Africans can do, it essentially creates an unemployment situation in which ordinary South Africans are left to live in poverty along with their families. Thus, the imbalance in the employment of foreign nationals at the expense of native South Africans may in one way or another lead to unnecessarily high levels of poverty in South Africa. Based on such a background, local citizens can easily conclude that foreign nationals are somehow to blame for their failure to obtain employment and ultimately their inability to conquer poverty. Similar sentiment is observed by Amusan and Mchunu (2017) commenting that: 'In an environment where some segments of the population enjoy a disproportionate amount of wealth, the inequality within such an environment builds up resentment and eventually, someone has to pay the price for such resentment' (Amusan & Mchunu, 2017, p. 4). Solomon and Kosaka (2013) argue that in a country where poverty and unemployment are widespread, xenophobic attitudes erupt when the citizens of such a country conclude that their government does not guarantee the protection of their individual rights, which is what inherently includes the right to employment that enables better living conditions (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 5). Amusan and Mchunu (2017) puts it: 'the dominant rationale of xenophobes is that immigrant workers are stealing jobs from South Africans' (Amusan & Mchunu, 2017, p. 12). In other words, for the locals, foreigners are the main reason for poverty because they take available jobs at low charges. In fact, Vahed and Desai (2013) have put it better than most scholars, stating that: 'in a context where poor South Africans are struggling to find work and find promises of service delivery empty, it is African foreigners with whom they live side by side who become the targets for anger and frustration' (Desai & Vahed, 2013, p. 145).

Solomon and Kosaka (2013) observed that the rapid influx of African foreigners into South Africa demonstrates the way in which South Africa is viewed as an African centre of economic, educational and cultural development. As a result, it is assumed in a way that its citizens have an obligation to share this wealth with their fellow African citizens (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 7). Although xenophobia cuts across races, the violence of May 2008 was mainly characterised by black South Africans on black foreign nationals. Steenkamp (2009) commented that though there has always been white illegal immigrants present in South Africa, they have never been affected or abused like their black counterparts (Steenkamp, 2009, p. 442). In fact, Solomon and Kosaka (2013) argued that unlike black African migrants, foreign nationals from emerging countries like Europe and America are always welcomed with open arms by local South Africans (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013, p. 8). Naturally, this led to some scholars using the term Afrobria to describe xenophobic incidents involving Africans over fellow Africans, or black on black as some would say (Amusan & Mchunu, 2017, p. 11; M L J Koeneane & Maphunye, 2015, pp. 83–98). However, what is important is to note that while this may be true, it defies all logic to assume that immigrants from wealthy countries would expose themselves to cheap labour as immigrants from poor African countries do. Therefore, their presence in South Africa will not

be a big deal to the locals simply because they do not provide cheap labour to the labour market as it is allegedly the case with most foreign nationals largely from poor African countries.

It is somewhat elitist to dismiss the view that the supply of cheap labour by foreign nationals does not contribute to rising unemployment and poverty. Furthermore, there is something wrong with a society where the local economy is run largely by foreigners who have dotted the area with small shops made from shipping containers. It is illogical not to expect that they will send some of the money they earn in such containers back to their loved ones who stayed behind in their home countries. Regardless of the extent, this situation is partly to blame for the poverty that continues to tyrannise inborn South Africans. It can be seen as a kind of exploitation of local resources for the benefit of the unknown. Indeed, it will take a miracle that South Africans would accept such exploitation while at the same time being trapped in poverty themselves. Indeed, it is somewhat further unscientific not to foresee xenophobic incidents in South Africa as a mere developing country, while some of the highly developed and prosperous countries like Russia have witnessed xenophobic incidents alike, particularly in 2002, with slogans like 'Russia for the Russians' dominating the Russia's public political opinions (Chapman, Marquardt, Herrera, & Gerber, 2018, pp. 381–394; Mukomel, 2015, p. 37). According to Kislov and Zhanaev (2017), in early 2017, then Deputy Prime Minister of Russia (2012–2020) Olga Golodets accused foreigners in Russia of being a burden on Russia's public services (Kislov & Zhanaev, 2017). Similarly, the United States of America (USA) witnessed its own share of xenophobia leading to slogans such as America for Americans (Lee, 2020). Koenane (2018) spoke of the hostile relationship that the USA has with Islamic countries to which former US President Donald Trump would institute Islamophobia policies (Mojalefa L.J. Koenane, 2018, p. 1). Whatever the causes may be, if the citizens and leaders of such powerful countries understand the need to limit public resources or to confine salvation to themselves analogous to the account of Noah, what then of less powerful countries like South Africa, where unemployment and poverty are raging? It leads to the assumption that once unemployment and poverty are tackled in a way that gives preference to local citizens, the likelihood of xenophobia is very low.

#### *Unfulfilled better lives for all*

The above section shows unemployment and poverty to be some of the main causes of xenophobia in South Africa, essentially addressing the vacuum of the unfulfilled promise of a better life for all. However, it is equally important to say something about this unfulfilled promise in the context of the *Missio Dei* and how this vacuum has contributed significantly to the problem of xenophobia in South Africa. In this way, the vacuum of the unfulfilled promise of a better life for all, particularly as it relates to the lack of public resources is identified as a broader cause of xenophobia. Koenane (2018) puts it more clearly: 'Generally, xenophobic attitudes are a result of a struggle for scarce resources which citizens believe they have more rights to than foreigners' (Mojalefa L.J. Koenane, 2018, p. 1). The mere struggle for scarce resources leading to xenophobic incidents has had a knock-on effect on efforts to achieve *Missio Dei's* goal, particularly in South Africa.

The political theologian Martin (2020) is right when he argues that the quest for common life in a society like South Africa is largely informed by the biblical vision of human beings freely and equally formed in the image of God (Martin, 2020, p. 24). Arguably, it was on this very wish that the idea of a better life for all is built. Millions of South Africans who voted for the African National Congress (ANC) into power did so because of a shared desire and aspirations to realise the dream of a better life for all, as promised by the ANC ahead of South Africa's first democratic national elections in April of 1994 (Matshiqi, 2007). The former president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma is on record saying: 'A vote for the ANC is a vote for a better life for all' (Booyesen, 2011, p. 110; Twala, 2014, p. 566). However, the very electorates did not know that South Africa would soon be marked by a series of protest actions against bad services, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, income inequality, or broadly the lack of a better life for all, so to speak. They could not have imagined that after more than 20 years have passed, such dreams are not achieved. Worse still, this constituency never envisioned that foreign nationals, legal or

not, would first enjoy or exploit the first fruits of a better life, regardless of the socioeconomic plight of indigenous South Africans.

A series of violent public protests in South Africa is a clear sign that the dream of a better life for all is elusive for most of its citizens. Furthermore, in a country where citizens are dragged into protest actions daily, it is not surprising that xenophobic incidents are at play. It is no coincidence that scholars such as Bekker (2015) have found that largely the same people who have protested against foreigners in South Africa are the same people who would happen to participate in protests against the provision of services. Based on this insight, he concludes that South Africans are not necessarily xenophobic, but that the hardships of their lives, encompassed by the unfulfilled dream of a better life for all, have pushed them to their limits (Simon, 2015, p. 231). Desai and Vahed (2013) alluded to the fact that even some South African Home Affairs officials regularly support the observation that foreign nationals are overburdening public services in South Africa, thereby shattering the dream of a better life for all (Desai & Vahed, 2013, p. 162). Consequently, no one can disagree with the assertion that the dream of a better life for all is central to the aspirations of most South Africans, who are at once political voters and believers, in particular Christian believers. Unfortunately, the mere absence or postponement of a better life for all has a direct negative impact on the achievement of *Missio Dei's* goal.

#### 4. Policy making and *Missio Dei*

First, it is important to discuss the art of policymaking concerning the mandate of the *Missio Dei*. Although largely exercised by politicians and civil servants (Alesina & Tabellini, 2007, pp. 169–179), the realm of public policy directly affects how societies are geared or socialised towards free participation in the work of the *Missio Dei* and even geared towards achieving *Missio Dei's* ultimate goal of salvation. While societies need to strive for inclusive policies, particularly migration management policies, such policies must not ignore or lighten the plight of local citizens. Regrettably, as rightly noted by several scholars, a contributing factor is that South Africa does not appear to have a clear immigration policy which, if properly applied, could help prevent xenophobic cases (Desai & Vahed, 2013, p. 149). Better still, even where such a policy is clear, the strict implementation by the authorities seems to be lacking (Krensel, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary and important to have a policy that not only deals with immigration issues but also takes stock of local realities about immigration. In other words, the best way to prevent or avoid xenophobic cases is for policymakers to prioritise not developing policies that ignore the circumstances in which local citizens find themselves. Unfortunately, while it may be true that xenophobic attacks lead to crime, it has become a political trend for politicians like Malema to blindly deny the very existence of xenophobia. He classifies it as an opportunistic crime committed by local citizens who commit it by his standards somehow are not interested in realising the dream of the African renaissance, or worse, attributing it to the front door of the ANC with surreptitious intentions of gaining political points (Asakitikpi & Gadzikwa, 2015, p. 234). On the contrary, although the ANC presents itself as the people's parliament or broad church for all South Africans (Booyesen, 2011, p. 5), several leaders within the ANC have publicly denied the existence of xenophobia in South Africa. Both Everatt (2011) and Tella (2016) referred to several scholars who posited that except former President Jacob Zuma, figures such as the late former President Nelson Mandela and former President Thabo Mbeki are among the top politicians who deny xenophobia rather than confronting the issue head-on (Everatt, 2011, p. 11; Tella, 2016, pp. 149–150). This is further supported by Mlambo (2019), who relied on Mosselson (2010) to claim that the South African government tends to deny the existence of xenophobia, but instead, views it as pure criminal activity (Mlambo, 2019, p. 60; Mosselson, 2010). Parenthetically, Polzer (2010) penned an excellent article on xenophobia entitled Just Crime, as if to emphasise the hostile attitude of most South African politicians towards the xenophobia discourse. They then concluded that sticking to a discourse that characterises xenophobia only as a crime can divert efforts from addressing the core problem of xenophobia (Polzer, 2010, pp. 1–8). Arguably, this lack of political will, the government has resorted to not taking concrete action to address the xenophobia issue. In their excellent work on xenophobia, Misago et al. (2015) shared this view and even cited Crush (2001) who pointed out that cases of xenophobia around the world are driven by the

government's unwillingness to even admit that countries have xenophobia problem (Misago et al., 2015, p. 29). Unfortunately, it leaves it up to the local citizens to take the law into their own hands. In fact, Mosselson (2010) recited the testimony of an offended Alexandra resident who had promised to attack foreigners unless the government did its part, saying: 'the government, if they don't do something we're going to kill them. We're not going to fight, we're not going to march or something, we're going to take the law into our hands. We're going to kill them' (Mosselson, 2010, p. 654). Thus, while it is important that political leaders show some commitment to the African renaissance, or even humanitarian considerations, when shaping policy, such a bias must not ignore or deny local issues faced by local South Africans. Furthermore, in a country like South Africa, where citizens face absurd realities such as poverty, unemployment and deprivation on a daily basis, to name a few, policy making must be strategically oriented to primarily address such local challenges before trying to help other nations. Otherwise, there is likely to be hostilities between local and foreign citizens. Any denial of local challenges as a source of xenophobia is the basic recipe for xenophobia itself. Therefore, it is important that policy makers first acknowledge or address the local challenges so that they can begin the process of policymaking that is consistent with current local challenges on the one hand and the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*, as Noah's account shows on the other hand. Furthermore, it is important that all African countries adopt or develop a unified immigration policy to avoid a repetition of xenophobia in all African countries, thus serving the purpose of the *Missio Dei* throughout Africa and possibly the whole world.

If the achievement of the ultimate and broader goal of *Missio Dei* is properly prioritised, policymakers must first and foremost promote policies that ensure the achievement of the *Missio Dei* goal at the local level. Put differently, just as South Africa cannot be solely responsible for achieving the goal of the African Renaissance (Vale & Maseko, 1998, pp. 271–287), every other African country must work locally towards achieving the *Missio Dei* goal. Therefore, local politics must ensure that local policymaking is consistent with the broader goal of the *Missio Dei* at the local level, rather than sacrificing local salvation in favour of global salvation. Without saying anything negative about the politics of other countries, it can be argued that there is a reason why Noah and his family found favour in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). Indeed, Noah's account remains a testimony that salvation, as the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*, can and should begin at the local level before it can spread to other regions. Surely Noah and his family would not have made it to salvation if suddenly after the ark was completed, the whole world climbed into a tiny ark that he had built for members of his family and a select few animals.

While it is true that policy-making consists of technical goals in pursuit of social stability, when such goals are met or missed, they have profound implications for the very stability of a society and thus for the wider *Missio Dei's* goal. Therefore, in any society, there should be some overlap between the role of policy-making and the work of the *Missio Dei*, particularly in South Africa where the majority of political electors belong to a religion that pursues the aim of the *Missio Dei*. What then becomes important in this whole process is to ensure that policy-making considers the free interaction of ideologies, including religious ideologies that will lead societies towards a unified goal of salvation. One classic example of policymaking that can either lead to salvation or disaster is how politics of HIV and AIDS were conducted during the presidency of the second black President of South Africa Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki (1999-2008) when ordinary South Africans looked to ANC's government to develop public health policies that would save their lives against HIV/AIDS (Fassin, 2003, pp. 495–497). Similarly, most South Africans relied on the ANC government to develop effective public health policies to prevent deaths at a time when countries around the world were being hit hardest by Covid-19 (Moonasar et al., 2021, pp. 1–4; Powers, 2021, pp. 60–72). The perceived outcomes of policy-making, especially in a democratic country like South Africa, cannot be influenced only by political ideologies but must reflect or represent all perspectives, including religious perspectives. The inclusion of religious ideologies will go a long way in demonstrating the depth of democracy in a given society. Therefore, consistent with this argument, this paper believes that policymaking must be consistent with

the mandate of the *Missio Dei*, as such a process is likely to be most effective, particularly as a unifying tool attempting to bring society into a more unified society in line with the mandate of *Missio Dei*.

In this regard, the mandate of the *Missio Dei*, as shown in Noah's account, informs that policies should be designed so that salvation is primarily limited to a specific context. Once such policies, which prioritise local salvation, are copied by other countries, it can be said that the whole world is moving in the right direction towards the goal of *Missio Dei*, or as Johann Goethe puts it: 'Let everyone sweep in front of his own door, and the whole world will be clean'. Of course, such a process will have its own evolving challenges and problems, but the mere possibility of such disruptions is not enough to abandon the important work of first providing a circumscribed salvation consistent with or linearised to the *Missio Dei*'s ultimate goal.

The primary result and recommendation of this article show that in a society like South Africa, where the majority of its citizens are Christian, or at least in a country where the vast majority of its citizens identify as religious members, the supremacy of God is important to be considered in the policymaking. The purpose of such consideration is to invoke such sovereignty through the preamble of their democratic constitution so that the policymakers or politicians shape public policies following the religious principles or philosophies held by their constituents. The mere fact that incidents of xenophobia continue uninterruptedly around the world, and particularly in South Africa, strongly suggests that current approaches to policy-making are not working, but that more collective efforts are needed, inspired by collective ideologies that reflect alignment towards a common goal of saving lives. In line with *Missio Dei*'s broader work, this paper efficiently argued that if xenophobia is to be defeated at all, it is important to first domesticate salvation through policymaking and ensure that local politics are aligned with *Missio Dei*'s ultimate goal.

Second, African countries must appoint leaders who understand the purpose of the *Missio Dei* and can craft policies that will first and foremost ensure that their respective countries achieve salvation, rather than leaders who are filled with selfish desires at the expense of their constituencies. In this way, every African country contributes equally to the achievement of the *Missio Dei* goal. Essentially, African political leaders, particularly South African policymakers, must always strive for public policies that avoid conflicts such as xenophobia as the inevitable outcome. Therefore, circumstances leading to xenophobia or xenophobic attacks can only be avoided in any African country if and when each country crafts public policies that are geared towards achieving domesticated salvation for its people.

Third and lastly, the imperative for countries, particularly South Africans, to love others requires that they first have enough for themselves to be able to pass on to people of other nations. Through salvation for a better life have been achieved by South African citizens, the achievement can also be extended to other neighbouring countries. To achieve the goal of the *Missio Dei* all the people should work together, at least each country secure its own salvation plan.

## 5. Conclusion

The work in this paper was able to accomplish the following: In the first section, it presented the *Missio politica* as the missiological framework rooted in political theology as the ideal method to merge the mandate of politics with that of the *Missio Dei*. The second section underscored total salvation as the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei* and went on to highlight Noah's account in Genesis 6-9 to support the idea of local or restricted salvation. The third section looked at xenophobia as perceived in South Africa during the 2008 and 2015 outbreaks respectively. It also pointed to unemployment and poverty, in the sense of the ANC's unfulfilled promises of a better life for all, as the main contributing factors to the problem of xenophobia in South Africa. Finally, it sought to reconcile the work of public policymaking with the operations of the *Missio Dei*. In addition, it asserted that it is important for policymakers to be familiar with religious concepts or doctrines that their constituencies subscribe to, as presented in this paper, such tenets include but are not limited to the work and ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*.

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